DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 035 452 PS 002 744

TITLE	Making a Child's Own Book.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Early Childhood Education, Urbana, Ill.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Economic Opportunity, Washington, D.C. Community Action Program.
PUB DATE	Nov 69
NOTE	2p.
JOURNAL CIT	Head Start Newsletter; v4 n8 p2-3 Nov 1969
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.20
DESCRIPTORS	Books, *Class Activities, *Creative Activities, Individual Activities, *Preschool Programs
IDENTIFIERS	*Bookmaking, Head Start

ABSTRACT

This paper describes a classroom activity in which children make their own books, an activity which may increase children's language abilities and confidence. Four possibilities for classroom-produced books are mentioned: (1) the dictated story, with the teacher taking down the child's exact words, (2) the picture-story book with the child making up a story to go along with a picture he has drawn, (3) the picture dictionary, with the child telling what certain pictures represent, and (4) the language experience book, with the exercise centered around some particular use of words. Use of a felt-tipped pen and large distinct letters help to familiarize the children with the written word. The books should be on standard size paper and can be stapled or threaded together on the left side. The child can put his name on his book and decorate its cover. All books can become part of the classroom library. (MH)

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Making a child's own book

Children enjoy making up stories about themselves and their experiences. In Madison, Wisconsin, four-year-old Jon dictated A Story About Me and included facts important to him, like his mother's telephone number at work. In Athens, Georgia, a kindergarten class worked as a group, dictating Our Pond Poems to their teachers, and then drew pictures to illustrate their poetry. A Mississippi five-year-old dictated phrases about his fear of the dark and declined to draw any "scary" pictures at all.

When put together into books, these stories can be an important part of your classroom library. A bookmaking activity, in addition to being fun, teaches a child that his words are valuable, that he can talk about the things he thinks about, that he can transfer his thoughts onto paper, and that the marks on the page have meaning.

Here are four possibilities for your class's "own book" activities.

1. The dictated story: Ask the child to tell you a story. Suggest that he tell you about any recent event in his life. Take down his exact words as he says them.

2. The picture-story book: Ask the child to draw a picture on the top half of the page. Suggest a topic, unless he has already thought of one. Then take down his words as he tells you about the picture. The pictures can be in sequence, telling the events of a story, or each picture can tell a story all by itself.

3. The picture dictionary: Have the child paste several pictures (previously cut from magazines) or draw pictures on a page. Ask him to tell you what each picture represents. Print his definition beside the picture. If he has misunderstood, try to find something in his answer that is correct, then tell him the correct definition and write it down.

4. Language experience books: Any book is a language experience book, but to emphasize language, try making books centered around a particular use of words. For example: Try a rhyme book; explain to the children what a rhyme is, choose a word they understand, like "sing," and ask them to think of words that sound like sing.

   Try a book of comparisons: suggest a few figures of speech, using comcepts from the children's experience, like "soft as cotton" or "cold as ice" and ask them to fill in the comparison for "little as _____."

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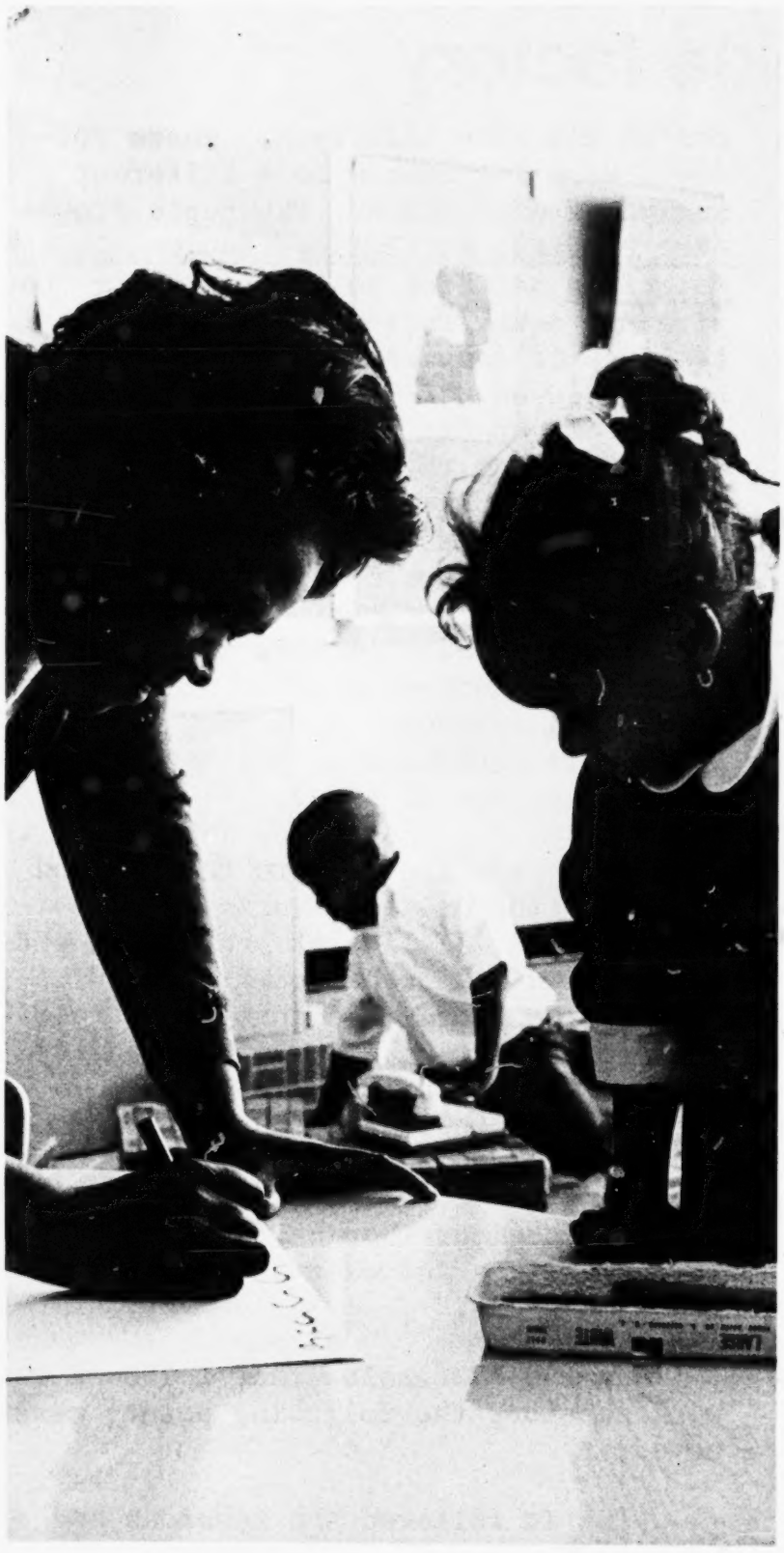

Try a book about each of the five senses; call attention to their sense of hearing; suggest sounds the children often hear; ask them to tell what else they hear. Take down their replies. Don't edit or change the child's statements. He may use slang or dialect expressions that seem inappropriate to you, but which are meaningful to him. Show that you respect what he says by listening to him carefully and taking down his exact words. The book-making activity will be a more satisfying experience if you do not use it as a time to criticize or correct his words. He will recognize the words as his own when you read them back to him.

Here are a few pointers on how to make books with the children:

Using a felt tipped pen or black crayon make large, distinct letters. Use manuscript writing rather than cursive handwriting. If you make lower case letters, the children will become accustomed to seeing them; capitalize only proper names and words that begin sentences.

Standard size paper (8½ x 11) can be stapled or threaded together with string on the left edge. Layers of larger sheets can be stapled at a center fold. Brown wrapping paper or news print, both large in size and low in cost, are available from your local paper distributors.

Cover the pages with sturdy, brightly colored cardboard, construction paper, or manilla file folders. Mark the child's name on the book and let him decorate the cover.

Make it a point to treat books made by the children exactly the way the other books are treated. Include them in your classroom library where each child can look at the other children's books. If a child wants to do so, he should be allowed to take his book home.

This article is a preview chapter from a booklet for Head Start teachers and directors now in preparation at the ERIC Clearinghouse on Early Childhood Education.